

Accessibility Plan – Pacific School of Innovation and Inquiry

Introduction:

We acknowledge that our school is located on the unceded Coast Salish Territory of the Lekwungen speaking people – the Songhees, Esquimalt, and Wsanec Nations. We are thankful to be able to meet and learn together here each day.

The Pacific School of Innovation and Inquiry (PSII) is a high school in Victoria, BC. We are dedicated to supporting students to follow lines of inquiry that allow them to dive deeply into topics that matter to them. We emphasize developing strong critical and creative thinking skills, scientific approach, and understanding the components and functions of systems. The school is just entering its eleventh year and, for the past decade, has been enriching the education of learners from diverse backgrounds, particularly with respect to neurodiversity. We recognize the importance of learning - truly understanding through observation and reflection, experimentation, creation - as opposed to 'learning about' - reading about a topic and answering surface-level questions a teacher has posed.

PSII recognizes the profound benefits of having a diverse school population. This includes (but is not restricted to) diversity with respect to culture, gender, and ability (physical, cognitive, etcetera). Having a diverse school population benefits everyone because it supports creativity in terms of approach, experience, and learning. We frequently remind ourselves that “we don’t know what we don’t know.” By having a community of diversity, we have the opportunity to know more, experience more, generate and pursue more diverse questions so that we can better understand the diverse world in which we live.

We developed our accessibility plan before the doors of the school even opened to learners. While administration and teachers have played profound roles not only in establishing and maintaining an accessible, inclusive environment, we also must acknowledge the significant contributions of our learners. Learners, over the years, have proposed and helped to implement various changes in the school that make the space a better place to learn. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Weekly, student-led sessions to discuss disability rights in BC and how physical changes to buildings, signage, and employee communication can impact accessibility. This included our youth working with local businesses (stores, regional transit, etc) to make their places of operation more easily accessible to people with physical disabilities
- The proposal and application for a local health authority grant to establish a sensory room (de-stimulation space) in the school. This room is used daily, without stigma, to the great benefit of nearly our entire student body
- The opportunity to learn languages such as American Sign Language (ASL) and to learn to read Unified English Braille (UEB). We have had more than 100 learners in the past 6 years learn ASL from Deaf instructors and, over the past two years, have a dozen learners who are becoming increasingly comfortable reading and writing in UEB
- Facilitating conversations that support inclusive language and that challenge inaccurate assumptions about ability.

Guiding Framework:

Employment

PSII is committed to identifying, removing, and preventing anything (physical or otherwise) that would serve as a barrier to accessibility. We respect the dignity, independence, and input of people with disabilities who can contribute to, inform, and guide our practice as administrators, teachers, and support staff.

Some of the methods we have already implemented include:

- using language and multiple styles of communication (verbal, written, diagrammatic, etc) in all communication about employment (from job postings to leave requests and everything in between) that is encouraging of diverse applicants and supportive of employees with diverse abilities.
- routinely consulting about the layout of the school space to ensure it meets the needs to both teaching staff and learners
- having regular, open, safe communication between administration and teaching and support staff about strategies that could be implemented to make the working environment accessible. This is often based on individual needs and preferred strategies for meeting those needs. Implementation strategies are developed through consultation and continuously assessed.

Delivery of Services

PSII undertakes to set up an accessible physical space and, importantly, to create a culture that respects and supports learners of all abilities. This is inherent in our approach to teaching and learning and includes such pedagogical pieces as:

- learners are working on individualized, co-constructed learning activities so most people in the environment are working on inquiries that are both meaningful to them and appropriate to their skill level and ability (challenging enough to be interesting but not so challenging as to be overwhelming). This largely prevents comparison of ability while simultaneously, inherently supporting each individual's learning needs
- the consideration of learners' needs and the involvement of learners in the consultation process when deciding on approach to learning activity. Plans are made specifically to meet each learner's goals as opposed to everyone being expected to do the same thing (which may necessitate adaptations for learners to be able to do so).

And includes the use of learning tools and technology such as:

- accessible apps to support learning (includes use of images, speech-to-text, text-to-speech, ability to adjust text sizes, etc) and ensuring teachers are comfortable supporting all learners in using these tools.
- modified tools and processes to support making things (for example, modifying the process of using power tools in the shop for someone with physical limitations)

And such physical pieces as:

- ensuring that all learning spaces are accessible by wheelchair and those using mobility aids (includes elevator access, leaving space for movement through all areas of the school)
- having multiple types of work space throughout the school (quieter spaces vs. louder spaces, spaces with more or less light, work surfaces of various heights and different types of seating)

And such support-staff pieces as:

- dedicated staff to support participation in physical activity (for example, a teacher who is available to belay when rock climbing)
- dedicated staff to help identify areas of strength that can be drawn upon and areas of challenge that can be addressed so that learners are able to meet their goals and fully engage in learning.

The Built Environment

PSII considered diverse need in the set up of our environment. We continue to evaluate how well our physical space meets the needs of our staff and learners. Considerations include:

- the current layout as well as potential modifications to the layout of the school
- the resources and equipment in the school, and how accessible these resources are
- assessment of how people are able to interact with, use, and benefit from the environment.

The goal is for staff and learners to be able to conduct themselves to the best of their abilities in all areas of the school.

We recognize the importance of responsiveness and consider how well people are able to meet their learning needs given the environment we have created. We make changes as necessary to meet these needs efficiently and in such a way that it is seamlessly integrated into the learning process. This involves responsiveness in terms of:

- identifying what resources could benefit an individual or individuals
- procuring resources
- organizing and delivering training on how to use resources
- identifying who can support the use of resources

Information and Communication

PSII understands that there is a diversity of preference and ability when it comes to communication. Information is often shared using more than one method (for example, written, verbal, diagrammatic). Communication considers all stakeholders (staff, learners, families, community members, government) and may be adapted depending on the needs or preferences of the intended audience. The goal is for everyone to be able to share and receive communication in a way that maximizes understanding.

Transportation

PSII believes that important learning happens both within and beyond the walls of the school. As such, we are regularly found outside the school walls. Nearby locations are often accessed by walking (both with and without the use of mobility aids and/or support staff). Accommodations are made as necessary to make sure all learners can engage in learning at locations that best support this. This includes providing and/or accommodating physical and/or emotional supports. Planning is done in advance for individual and group learning activities to be inclusive of all, whether a person who might require support has stated they want to join or not. This is to remove barriers to participation (we recognize that even requesting accommodation is a barrier). For learning activities that occur farther afield, we may take various forms of transportation including, but not limited to: bus, ferry, train, car, airplane.

Health

As much as possible, PSII strives to support the health of staff and learners by applying relevant health and safety measures. This includes taking physical measures such as performing regular water testing, maintaining air purification, conducting regular safety inspections, etc. For example, we use enhanced air filtration methods when and where hazardous substances are in use, such as in the science laboratory, the maker space, and the art studio. To accompany the physical measures, we have developed safe procedures that consider how people with diverse abilities might be supported to use more dangerous materials in support of their learning. We ensure that staff and learners are familiar with these processes by direct instruction, by using instructional signage, by checking for understanding, and through supervision.

Accommodations are made when impairments in staff and learners' health makes them less able to participate in learning by (not an exhaustive list):

- rescheduling activities
- reassessing and modifying due dates
- modifying goals
- providing additional, relevant support (materials, time, staffing, etc)
- connecting staff and learners with appropriate community supports

*please note the above accommodations are identified and agreed upon through a collaborative approach

Education

Our learner code of conduct includes one item: You are at PSII to go about your learning in a way that supports everyone else's ability to go about their learning. This allows for continual discussion of what it means to be an inclusive learning community since there is an acknowledged, shared responsibility to ensure everyone can learn here.

Procurement

PSII is committed to providing access to resources that supports staff to carry out their work and that supports learners to engage in meaningful lines of inquiry and to meet their learning goals. This includes identifying, acquiring, training, using, and evaluating the effectiveness of these tools. We recognize that needs change and that the relevance of supports should be reviewed regularly. Procurement of resources is sometimes to meet specific needs of individuals and at other times for the sake of providing shared resources to the community.

Committee:

- Jeff Hopkins (Co-Principal)
- Jessica Asp (Co-Principal)
- Clare Lannan (Teacher)
- Jenna Swett (Teacher)
- Alana Scott (Learner)
- Gemma Soper (Learner)

Feedback Mechanism:

Feedback is continuously being solicited from stakeholders. The email address: accessibility@learningstorm.org is provided for people to reach the Accessibility Committee directly.